



## **Kin Dza Dza! (1986)**

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# Kin Dza Dza! (1986)

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## Christianity and Its Transformations across Space

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### **Keywords:**

Science fiction, Christianity, Catholicism, Orthodox, Soviet Union, Russia, film

In this article, we attempt a discussion of the links between politics, religion and science fiction in the Soviet Union of the 1980s. Our particular focus is a film by Georgi Daneliya for which we provide an analysis of the Christian symbols and Biblical elements used. Our intention is to show that transformations of the religious imagery may occur in a specific political climate and that Biblical elements may be used to illustrate certain political ideals.

### *Kin Dza Dza!:* An Introduction

In 1965, appeared *33 (A Non-Science Fiction)*. It was Georgi Daneliya's first attempt at directing a speculative fiction comedy. At the time, it was considered anti-soviet and was banned. This was not an exception. Strange rumours surrounded the filming of Tarkovski's creations and the story of his infamous *Stalker* (1979), based on a Strugatski brothers novel, is among those peculiar examples of Soviet cinema that make one wonder about the fate of well-accepted films like *Kin Dza Dza!*. Daneliya never gave up on cinematography and 21 years later, directed a film whose music is strangely reminiscent of *33* and which was produced in the same studios. Moreover, he gave one of the four main roles to the leading actor of *33* – Evgeni Leonov, a famous, talented and much-loved actor. Almost immediately after its release in 1986, three years before the fall of the Berlin Wall, Georgi Daneliya's *Kin Dza Dza!* was serialised as a television show and thus became a cult film in Russia and the Communist Bloc countries. Since then, fans have not ceased to maintain that the movie has passed largely unnoticed by the rest of Europe and the Americas. The Second Life Conceptual blog, for example, defines *Kin Dza Dza!* as “the best sci-fi film that nobody has ever heard of”<sup>1</sup> and Amazon customer reviews call it a “truly amazing and overlooked film” that “virtually nobody in the western world ha[s] seen”<sup>2</sup>. However, as a Mosfilm Cinema Concern production, the film has been awarded 5 times in 4 different countries on 3 different continents. This “brilliantly conceived and excellently produced”<sup>3</sup> work has been prized for having the best music (1987), for being the best international fantasy film (1988) and a legend of the science fiction genre (2002). The *Kin Dza Dza!* passion has nowadays spread to cyber space where one stumbles upon countless versions of fan subtitles in English, upon enthusiastic webknots, *Kin Dza Dza!* aficionado galleries and forums, all of which can be googled and reached with a single click. In fact, a simple web search with the keywords “kin dza dza” renders 190,000 hits. The scenario, jointly written by Daneliya and Revaz

Gabriadze, found its way into the virtual world of Second Life where one can join the group Kin Dza Dza Cafe, visit a reconstructed flying machine and attend programmed screenings of the film<sup>4</sup>. A DVD has also been released and, to complete this 24-year success story, an animated remake in 3D is on its way. This is how Daneliya's work withstood the cultural and political trials of the last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> and made it into the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

*Kin Dza Dza!* and the genre to which it belongs have been defined and redefined many times. It is important to note, however, that the Soviet science fiction which came out in print was bonded to filmography from its earliest beginnings. Hence, *Kin Dza Dza!* undoubtedly belongs to the vast realm of Soviet science fiction. The film has been presented as a cyberpunk fantasy before its time, as allegorical science fiction and a dystopian satire, as a grotesque comedy and a "post-apocalyptic anti-utopian sci-fi comedy"<sup>5</sup>. In fact, it is all of these at once and much more. Our analysis of Daneliya's film takes into account the fact that the image and the word are complementary and that the film director also worked on the script. Hence, the study of the dialogue and of the cinematographic aspects of the film is of fundamental importance.

Humour, satire, the cyberpunk costumes and the ingredients for an adventure quest lighten the effect of the dystopian elements which are not used to their full potential. The film tells the story of Gedevan Alexandrovitch, the Georgian, and Vladimir Nikolaevitch, the Muscovite, who travel to the desert planet Pliuk<sup>6</sup> in the galaxy Kin Dza Dza. There, they meet the telepathic Mr Wef and his mindreading companion Bi, travelling artists by profession, from whom they learn that the promiscuous races on Pliuk are colour-coded and that the ruling Chetlanian classes exercise their power over the low-class Patsaks via uncontrollable state police who wear revolving light bulbs on their heads. This complex extra-terrestrial society is exclusively based on moneyed transactions and exchanges of much-praised

matches. Gedevan and Vladimir find their way back to Earth with difficulty, after a series of adventures involving episodes in a Pliukian prison, an absurd show of horrid violin playing, a meeting with the magnificent but senile Pliukian leader P.J. and a brief stop on neighbouring planet Alpha where all Pliukians get transformed into cactuses and need not share their own pots with someone else. Once Gedevan and Vladimir set foot back on Earth, they realise that the experience has changed them forever.

In order to fully grasp the complexity of the seemingly incongruous and bizarre succession of events, we should bear in mind that Russia has a long tradition in science fiction with a Golden age taking place during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, somewhere between the rise of the Iron Curtain and the fall of the Berlin Wall. At that particular moment in history, many Soviet science fiction writers explored the themes of space pioneering and scientific adventure as inseparable from the social and political changes of their country, resulting from a comparatively radical communist regime. The clashes between different worlds and political systems alluded to the real world and Soviet science fiction progressively acquired two faces – the widely accepted progress-oriented facade and the more obscure, critically subversive one. Partly on account of this duality and partly because of their European heritage, many authors produced communist utopias and satires of capitalism and/or contemporary society, frequently alluding to the real world. For this reason, science fiction became an outlet for the serious disguised as amusing, entertaining or humorous. The displacement of the actual from the real world to a distanced fictional plane became a means of discussing politics and power without having to fear censorship. To a certain degree, the humorous touch explains both the success and the acceptance of *Kin Dza Dza!*. The film might have also escaped censorship because of the *perestroika* and *glasnost* policies of the 1980s.

## The Soviet Union: Politics, Science Fiction, Religion

Before presenting and analysing some of the most prominent Christian symbols used in *Kin Dza Dza!*, we shall attempt to explain the interrelations between politics, religion and science fiction at the time and country of its production. In that sense, there are two things that we should bear in mind. Firstly, it is important to note that both Daneliya and Gabriadze are Georgian by birth but have been citizens of the Soviet Union. Here, it is equally important to remember that Georgia has frequently been in opposition and/or open conflict with Russia. In addition, the country was Stalin's homeland and became, for a certain period, the birthplace of the dictator who ruled the Soviet Union. Secondly, Georgia was one of the first states to officially adopt Christianity around 300 – 330 AD and recent research suggests that this might have happened earlier with Christianity starting to spread during the first century AD. At the basis of Georgian identity lie repetitive political and religious confrontations with other countries, traditions and religions. *Kin Dza Dza!* deals with Georgian dependency and the power conflicts between the ruled nation and the ruling Union or as the Pliukians put it, it is a question of who will kneel in front of whom.

It is believed that religion and communism are incompatible, that Soviet propaganda and the cult of the personality excluded the possibility of a Christian cult. In fact, the explicitly antireligious Marxist-Leninist interpretation of communism could not be conciliated with faith. Indeed, Karl Marx justifies “the abolition of religion” and terms it “the illusory happiness of the people” (Marx 244).

*The Communist Party destroyed churches, mosques, and temples; it executed religious leaders; it flooded the schools and media with anti-religious propaganda; and it introduced a belief system called “scientific atheism,” complete with atheist rituals, proselytizers, and a promise of worldly salvation. (Froese 35)*

Quoting E. Moroz's *Istoriia 'Mertvoi vody'* (2005), Marlène Laruelle points out that from the second half of the 1930s, the rebirth of Russian nationalism supported by Stalin seems to denounce Christianity "for accepting justifications for class division" (Laruelle 286). The tendency continued during the 1960s with Nikita Khrushchev. Thus, the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century saw a progressive renewal of skepticism, of enlightened atheism and faith in scientific development, all of these combined with an active rereading of various pre-Christian traditions. Telling examples are the plenary sessions of the CPSU Central Committee where plans for technical progress and high efficiency were made and during which a strengthening of the anti-faith struggle was called for. What is then the link between the political regime of the Soviet Union and Christianity? Since Orthodox Christianity was suppressed, the state had to offer an alternative and a replacement for it. In fact, according to Victor Shnirelman and Paul Froese, the party's ideological commission encouraged the establishment of new, non-religious rituals (Shnirelman 231) to the point of becoming an alternative religion itself (Froese 37). Thus, several ambitious clergy abandoned the old religion for a new one and became "atheist proselytizers for the League of Militant Atheists" (Froese 37). In that climate, the sole legal political party excluded all other organizations, having other leaders at their head, and public worship was redirected from the wholly spiritual to the scientifically tangible.

Science fiction comes in adequation with these ideas because it supposes that the truth, which certainly is out there, is necessarily a scientifically explainable one. Spirituality is reconsidered and transformed into a combination of assurance, conviction and inquisitiveness. The unknown is explained. The skies are no longer inhabited by an omniscient God but by beings, some of them rather different from the ones that can be found on Earth, but beings nevertheless. In this sense, Soviet science fiction provokes a rethinking of the myths of creation and offers an alternative to the fundamental questioning concerning the human

genesis. It is difficult to judge whether these themes are addressed intentionally in *Kin Dza Dza!*. The initial direction of the script might have had a covertly political target rather than a religious one. The spiritual touch is probably a resultant repercussion. However, there is a clear-cut link between religion and the scenario of *Kin-Dza-Dza!*. The film is concerned with the Christian myths without showing it directly, intentionally or explicitly. It addresses and confronts three societies and three examples of morality whose sentiments of primacy and superiority clash with one another. The concern of all three is to find out who comes first in the universal experiment of creation. The men from Earth carry a very complex politico-religious heritage which tells them that they are the ones. Therefore, they feel the need to prove themselves the more compassionate and benevolent nation after discovering that the Pliukians are manifestly the more technologically advanced civilisation, i.e. the Pliukian primacy in terms of scientific evolution is unquestionable. The emotionally primitive and barbaric men from Pliuk, devoid of all sensibility, exercise their destructive technological power on everyone and everything in a vain attempt to assert their own authority over the known Universe. After their passage everything turns to dust and their home planet has become a desert. On the other hand, the enlightened, falsely saint-like inhabitants of the Edenlike planet Alpha take themselves for gods, thinking that they can have a say in the personal destiny of each and everyone. They are completely withdrawn but are omnipresent and intimidating in their robes of immaculate white. The name of their planet is indicative of their claim to the position of firstborn.

In *Kin Dza Dza!*, the encounter of two Soviet Union citizens with other beings can be interpreted as an attempt to strengthen the idea that the Soviet system of ethics is the right one, confirming the scheme of progressive secularization of the communist state. Vladimir and Gedevan are very incredulous by nature and can be said to represent the archetypes of the enlightened atheist – one is a construction engineer and the other a student. Things like art and



faith lie in a completely different sphere for them. When they meet the two extraterrestrial artists, their first impression is that they are in a “capitalist country”<sup>7</sup> where spirituality has become a caged moneyed performance executed on the front seat of a popemobile (the vehicle is called “pepelats” on Pliuk, can also fly and has the form of a wine bottle opener). The moral decay and fall of the Pliukians comes as a confirmation of the greater potential of scientific atheism. This is why in the first part of the film, Gedevan and Vladimir feel superior and express their moral ascendancy openly by refusing to obey Pliukian police, the guardians of the P.J. cult. On the other hand, other scenes in the film seem to claim the inverse, more specifically that a society without faith becomes a lost world. The Pliukians have lost “of all the commandments [...] the most important one” and that is the decree to “love your neighbour as yourself”<sup>8</sup>. Hence, they have lost all the values of a functioning society – tolerance, charity, democracy – and have replaced them with active segregation and simulacra of controlled religion. In this sense, *Kin Dza Dza!* might also be interpreted as a warning that the eventual extreme of scientific atheism can lead to complete loss of faith and from there, to an ecological, economic, political, linguistic and moral apocalypse. The ambiguity of Daneliya’s critical stance resides in his treatment of politics as organised religion and in the distancing of this experiment from Earth and its country of origin.

Another parallel that can be drawn between the political and religious aspects of *Kin Dza Dza!* and Soviet reality is the personality cult. “The godlike worship of Communist elites appears the most ironic twist of Soviet communism” (Froese 43). It allowed the state to play on the Catholic and Orthodox belief of “incorruptibility” of the body by exposing the embalmed corpse of Lenin before the public to adore and worship. Likewise, an important part of *Kin Dza Dza!* deals with the powerful, enigmatic, threatening father figure of P.J. who seems to have always been the one and only leader as if touched by immortality. The two space travellers Gedevan and Vladimir are confronted with a world from which religious

devotion has decayed into idolatry but in reality, the truth is more complex. True faith has been replaced by a form of “direct ideological indoctrination” (Schwartz, Bardi 387) and an enforced worship of P.J., the unfathomable leader of the Pliukians whom nobody has seen because he is dead, whose last breath is conserved in a huge red balloon in the centre of the capital and whose holograms can appear randomly and unexpectedly anywhere on the planet.

*Mr Wef:           This isn't a dirigible, you simpleton.  
                      This is Mr P.J.'s last breath.*

*Gedevan:       Nonsense. How can a person have so much breath?  
                      That's absurd.*

*Bi:               Don't blaspheme! P.J. is alive! And I am happy.*

*Mr Wef:        And I'm happier still.<sup>9</sup>*

In addition, one of the most memorable phrases in the film is “Say ‘Kou’ to worship!” which nowadays stands as a motto on the *Kin Dza Dza!* island in Second Life<sup>10</sup>. Both the Chetlanian and Patsak inhabitants revere the images of their leader much like Orthodox Christians venerate icons with the only difference that on Pliuk, they have to conform or else spend the rest of their miserable lives in a coffin lined with nails in an institution strongly reminiscent of the Catholic Inquisition. Several scenes in *Kin Dza Dza!* expose the strange extra-terrestrial rituals of preserving people’s last breath, depicting pale balloons of yellow parchment and of varying sizes. These float above ground and their size is indicative of the person’s social status in life. The colour of the scenery is always in unison with these floating graveyards. The rolls of film for *Kin Dza Dza!* were selected in view of this. The initial idea was to use high quality Kodak film but the decision to change it with rolls of lower quality was intentional, creating the impression of a burning heat. The occasional pastel red and orange colours are mixed with pale yellow and grey. The atmosphere is otherworldly and the impression is that of looking upon a scorched photograph through a thin veil. Pliuk is a planet where the white colour is yellow and the black colour is dark grey.

### Biblical Elements and Christian Symbolism in *Kin Dza Dza!*

There is no way of knowing whether the Christian symbols and Biblical elements in *Kin Dza Dza!* were used intentionally. The initial significance of the script might have targeted the political rather than the religious. The spiritual touch is probably a resultant repercussion. Yet, many Christian symbols are apparent and frequently occur in key moments of the plot. In addition, the spiritual and ethical dimensions of the terrestrial-extraterrestrial encounter are never tackled overtly but they are frequently alluded to with the help of Christian symbols and images. Another particularity of *Kin Dza Dza!* is the mixture of allusions to both Catholic and Orthodox Christianity. The numerous resemblances between the two currents of religious thought and the common but elusive Pan-European Christian heritage of may be the reason for this.

Among the Christian sacred writings, *The Book of Revelation* is one of the most frequently referred to in Soviet science fiction. For instance, it is used as the motto of Arkady and Boris Strugatski's *The Doomed City* (ca. 1970s). It is a justification for the "door standing open in heaven"<sup>11</sup>, revealing dystopian or apocalyptic visions of imaginary or parallel worlds. *Kin Dza Dza!* opens one such door. The planet Hanut, the home of all Patsaks, has gone blank and has been drained of light, water and air. Simultaneously, Gedevan Alexandrovitch and Vladimir Nikolaevitch discover that they too are Patsaks by nature. The discovery brings them to the question of their origins. If the post-apocalyptic landscape of Hanut had once been the home of a flourishing civilisation of which they are the ancestors, would it mean that humanity has been given a second chance on Earth? Gedevan and Vladimir have the privilege of standing on what is left of Eden after the fall of man and are offered the possibility to recreate it. The importance of their names, all of them from the Greek and Slavic semantic fields of "conquest" and "victory" is revelatory. However, they refuse to collaborate because

their vision of paradise differs greatly from that of their Pliukian comrades which is much less egalitarian:

*Bi:* *Now, the planet Hanut is very cheap.*  
*Mr Wef:* *63 chatl.*  
*Bi:* *We'll sing around the Galaxy for a month and the planet is ours.*  
*And within a month, we'll buy the air too.*  
*Mr Wef:* *93 chatl.*  
*Bi:* *If anyone comes on the planet, they won't have any air because*  
*we'll own it all.*  
*Mr Wef:* *They'll crawl in our feet and we'll be spitting on them.*  
*Gedevan:* *Why?*  
*Mr Wef:* *For pleasure.*  
*Gedevan:* *Where's the pleasure of spitting on people?*  
*Bi:* *(laughs) He's so young...*<sup>12</sup>

In the same way, their conception of how to perform and sing is different. The two couples can agree neither about the songs' contents and the corresponding dance movements nor about whether to sing in a cage or out of it. Their quarrel on the subject might be taken as an allusion to the Orthodox and Catholic differences in liturgy. However, it is unclear to what extent this allusion was conscious during the filming of *Kin Dza Dza!*.

Partly on account of the political regime in the Soviet Union, if anything was to be said about religion in *Kin Dza Dza!*, it had to be done by circumventing straightforward declarations. Hence, Christian symbolism is most usually revealed by the shot structure. The triangular forms and the pyramid are recurring elements in the film. Originally, the symbol of the Trinity, here the triangle is used to signify centralised power impersonated by the father figure of the dictator who is always dressed in white. When P.J. appears, he is always accompanied by a kneeling Patsak servant and, inevitably, the positioning of their bodies forms a triangle. The structure of several group shots is triangular and more particularly, the scenes involving musical performances. The pyramidal constructions symbolise the structure

of Pliukian society which is organised in four strictly colour-coded strata – the Patsak masses, the Etsilop police, the Chetlanian who wear yellow trousers and those who wear red ones are the four bases of the pyramid and on its top stands P.J. He is also the one who detains an unlimited right over water, the source of all life and sustenance. The pool scene in the second part of the film is reminiscent of a baptism ceremony with a slight tinge of homoeroticism. Naturally, as everything else on Pliuk, the ceremony is twisted and perverse. The satire of organised religion contains several layers of Christian elements which are separated from the intended purpose of their usage. A case in point is the usage of bells which are generally used as a call for prayer and a reminder of the origin and greater purpose for the things of this world with their sound being likened to of the music of Heavens. On Pliuk, they are used as a sign of submission and all Patsak are required to wear them on their nose.

The principal setting of *Kin Dza Dza!* is a desert. The film is structured along a series of exoduses from a city into the desert and back to a city. The two men from Earth and their extra-terrestrial companions cross the desert together then cross it again to the West (and the direction is of symbolic and historical importance) two by two in father-son figure couples. These are announced by extensive landscape shots of the Pliukian wasteland, followed by portrait shots of the protagonists. Initially a symbol of purification, the desert landscape in *Kin Dza Dza!* is representative of the spiritual condition of the protagonists. Just as the planet Hanut, plunged in permanent darkness, is indicative of their slavery and the obscurantism of the P.J. cult, the desolate wasteland of Pliuk is suggestive of the population's moral dissolution. The two-part structure of the film replicates the structure of the Bible into an Old and New Testament. Likewise, the first part of *Kin Dza Dza!* is about the origin and history of things – it tells the story of the first exodus from Earth, the history of the Pliukians and the plagues that turned their planet into a desert, the lack of light on Hanut being reminiscent of the Plague of Darkness. The second part of *Kin Dza Dza!* is built on St. Peter's "*Domine, quo*

*vadis?*”. When Vladimir and Gedevan cross the desert, Vladimir is portrayed as the leader, the man of faith while Gedevan remains the Doubting Thomas until the very end. Vladimir chooses the direction with assurance and determination. Gedevan walks behind and his questions are but a reformulation of St. Thomas’s “Lord, we don’t know where you are going, so how can we know the way?”<sup>13</sup> The second part is also about choices – the two Earthmen are in front of the dilemma to go back to Earth or save their imprisoned Pliukian friends. They are in front of this dilemma twice and always prefer exile to disloyalty. In this sense, the second part is also the place for ethics and moral lessons as it “seriously questions or rejects outright the scientific culture because it is the clearest manifestation of man’s flawed, fallen nature” (Born 252).

*Kin Dza Dza!* is about brothers in conflict and about the encounter between Self and Other, two entities that diverge only in the outcome of their history after their separation. *Kin Dza Dza!* supposes that a schism occurred at a particular moment in time on a certain planet. Its inhabitants settled in two different galaxies and evolved differently only from the point of their separation onwards until the day they met again. “living in profound tension with scientific knowledge that makes certainty in Christianity impossible but which in itself is an inadequate source of meaning—thus, both science and faith are rigorously examined and each found unsatisfactory” (Born 252). Hence, the film is not only a story of the boundaries between a Soviet satellite and the Soviet State but also confronts capitalism with communism, the East with the West. In addition to that, it tackles, somewhat accidentally, the severed links between the Roman Catholic and the Orthodox countries, presenting the European territories as partitioned into sections of religious and political influence. The film is an example of the partitioning between Roman Catholic and Orthodox countries which P. Gunst sees as “overlap[ping] other lines of demarcation” including their differences in scientific adaptation on a global level and their technological development. If the home country of Vladimir and

Gedevan is an Orthodox one, the planet Pliuk corresponds to the Catholic society of Western Europe and the planet Alpha, situated midway between the two is the substitute for the Catholic Central European countries under Soviet influence. The leader of Alpha is dressed like a Pope; he talks and behaves like a Pope and his body language is that of a Catholic priest blessing the multitudes. According to P. Gunst,

*the Roman Catholic countries formed a Central European region whose socioeconomic development and agricultural adaptation to world markets placed it midway between East and West (Gunst 53–91).*

Indeed, this can be inferred from the difference in clothing and from the technological development on Alpha which is the land in the middle. From there one can either return back on Earth or go back to Pliuk. Moreover, on account of its particular system of ethics, Alpha is characterized by greater opposition to the penetration of Pliukian modes of life. The planet is likened to Central European countries which were resistant to communism and had stronger oppositional movements (Ascherson 221–237). Undoubtedly, the variation along economic and sociopolitical lines relates to the differences in value priorities (Schwartz, Bardi 388) – while the survival of nature and resistance to Pliuk are the predominant concerns on Alpha, the survival of man with or without nature is of importance on Pliuk.

The models of society used in *Kin Dza Dza!* have been transposed into the film from the map of a partitioned, divided Europe. Hence, *Kin Dza Dza!* addresses the divisions and clashes between individuals, originating in a profound divergence of ideas and mindsets. The construction of a national identity within a multinational union of Soviet states is presented as impossible via the idea of the broken nation of Hanut. The role of religion as ethnic solidarity is absent because the film is built on series of doubles and mirror images of separate worlds – the Soviet State and Georgia, the Communist Block and the rest of Europe, communism and capitalism, Orthodoxy and Catholicism. The worlds of *Kin Dza Dza!* are mirror images of one

another and at the same time of the European political map during the 1980s. The terrestrial and extra-terrestrial the clashes with the Other sometimes reveal a profound likeness.

*Bi: Is it true that nobody sings in cages on Earth?*

*Gedevan: Mr Bi, on Earth only animals are kept in cages.*

*Bi: Are these animals Chetlanian?*

*Gedevan: I don't know. Chetlanians are like animals sometimes.*

*Mr Wef: Is the nightingale Patsak?*

*Gedevan: Why should it be?*

*Mr Wef: It was you who said it sings without a cage!*

*Gedevan: Well, then it is.*

*Bi: See? You have the same open racism as here on Pliuk.*

*But on Earth it is the Patsak who detain power. Not the Chetlanian!*

*Just like you and your friend the nightingale.<sup>14</sup>*



### By Way of Conclusion

As A. Need and G. Evans justly point out, it is not always certain what “the impact of seven decades of atheistic communism” (Need, Evans 299) might be when differentiating between the Orthodox and the Catholic denominations. For example, it could have provoked the change in religious affiliations noted during the 1970s when only 28% of the population declared themselves Orthodox and 31% declared themselves “other professing Christians” (Froese 39). It might also explain the two simultaneously occurring, seemingly contradictory developments – secularization and religious revival (Agadjanian 351). While those changes operated in society, the importance of science fiction seemed to grow. The phenomenon might partly explain why the Golden Age of Soviet science fiction occurred when it did to become an outlet for religious and/or existential concerns.

As a part of that movement, *Kin Dza Dza!* is a film about changes and about the imminent confrontation with the other. In that, it is representative of the 1980s. Through the eyes of the space travelers, the universe is seen as the harmonious unity it had been before a great schism split it apart. The Earth, Hanut, Pliuk and Alpha counterbalance each other and despite the colossal dissimilarities of their fates, their populations have the same origins. The film enacts the reunification of brothers, upholding the idea that man is capable of the best and the worst, that integrity and spirituality are acquired and not innate.

In an interview, Daneliya said that directing *Kin Dza Dza!* “felt like making something punkish”<sup>15</sup>. *Kin Dza Dza!* is punkish in the satirical and political aspects of the question and because it addresses social injustice and economic disparity. In addition, the film represents an attempt to end the inequalities and cross the border with the West, to have a look at the other side, to gather enough courage and feel free to tell that story back home. Illustrated by Gedevan’s remark that it is “just because you say what you don’t think and think what you

don't think, that you sit in cages”<sup>16</sup>, the transformation of the ideal of freedom, and more specifically the freedom of speech, in the Soviet Union acquires a multitude of dimensions. On the political, as well as the spiritual level, it is linked to the evolution of the Catholic clergy's understanding of liberty and to its relationship with the rest of the Christian world.

*One thinks immediately of the Church's movement from her initial rejection of the idea of religious liberty to Vatican IPs embrace of a human right to religious liberty as a defining element of a rightly ordered polity. More broadly here, one thinks of the transition from the nineteenth-century Church's initial posture of suspicion towards "rights talk" to her contemporary affirmation of the existence of an order of human rights and insistence that protection and promotion of these rights lies at the very heart of the government's responsibilities. (Grasso 45)*

In the countries of what Pope Pius XI called the “terrible triangle”, science fiction became a form of “inner emigration” through which writers were seeking to escape the government as well as the intellectual signification of communism by withdrawing into their spiritual world (Agadjanian 351). Since mass religiosity was impossible, the regime provoked an intellectual schism where the writing/filming/directing persona became separate from the persona of the Soviet citizen. Science fiction was then “ripe for making observations about religion and spirituality because it lent itself to parable-telling and myth-making” but it also “create[d] a mystic point of view that [did] not deny the other side of the world, the devil's madness” (Winston 35). Both remarks apply to *Kin Dza Dza!* which is partly a parable – it has a simple setting (a desert planet), focuses on the actions of the participants, shows the results of these actions and their moral implications. The only deviation from the parable is that Daneliya's lessons are very ambiguous. It still remains to be seen which side in the film is indulging in “the devil's madness”. It is impossible to take a side as to who criticises whom and that instability seems to be a move towards reconciliation of the three worlds in *Kin Dza Dza!*.

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<sup>1</sup> FAWL Tony, "Kin Dza Dza – Strange Russian Science Fiction", Science Fiction SadCAST Review <http://slconceptual.wordpress.com/2007/08/03/kin-dza-dza/>, last accessed 03-01-2010.

<sup>2</sup> WARD Ryan A., "A truly amazing and overlooked film!", Amazon Review May 2006, <http://www.amazon.com/Kin-dza-dza/dp/B00024MH8C>, last accessed 03-01-2010.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. note 1.

<sup>4</sup> cf. "Projection du film Kin Dza Dza sur Second Life" <http://www.webknot.net/2009/07/22/projection-du-film-kin-dza-dza-sur-second-life/> and for photos of the screening "La Galerie Photos de Eupalinos Ugajin", <http://www.flickr.com/photos/eupalinos/sets/72157621604672651/detail/>. Spoilers from the animated version of *Kin Dza Dza!* are available on the Quiet Earth website, "Russian Cult Cyberpunk/Sci-Fi Flick gets Animated", June 2009 <http://www.quietearth.us/articles/2009/06/26/Russian-cult-cyberpunkscifi-flick-KINDZADZA--gets-animated>, last accessed 04-01-2010. A very enlightening review of the film is available at <http://www.webknot.net/2008/11/27/kin-dza-dza-1986/>, last accessed 05-01-2010.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid. note 1.

<sup>6</sup> Most translation and transcription difficulties reside in the fact that the imaginary world of *Kin Dza Dza!* is in a linguistic crisis. G. Daneliya and R. Gabriadze imagined a different, extra-terrestrial language for their script, much in line with what G. Orwell (1984) had done before them and what A. Burgess (*Clockwork Orange*) would do later on. Many words denote this or that and imply both one thing and its opposite. Most expressions containing extra-terrestrial terms can take on a variety of meanings.

<sup>7</sup> *Kin Dza Dza!* part 1, 10:41 min.

<sup>8</sup> "The Greatest Commandment", *The Holy Bible* – New International Version, Mark 12:28-31

<sup>9</sup> *Kin Dza Dza!* part 2, 16:08 min. The translation is mine.

<sup>10</sup> The photograph is mine. Taken in Second Life, Linden research Inc. (<http://lindenlab.com/>) on 12 January 2010. <http://secondlife.com/>. The linguistic crisis on Pliuk is so deep that the language has only two words – "kiu" and "kou". The first is a socially acceptable swearword. "Kou", on the other hand, stands for all other words.

<sup>11</sup> "The Throne in Heaven", *The Holy Bible* – New International Version, Revelation 4:1

<sup>12</sup> *Kin Dza Dza!* part 2, 45:19 min. The translation is mine. "Chat!" is the Pliukian money.

<sup>13</sup> "Jesus the Way to the Father", *The Holy Bible* – New International Version, John 14:5

<sup>14</sup> *Kin Dza Dza!* part 2, 08:30 min. The translation is mine.

<sup>15</sup> "Kin-dza-dza", Russian Cinema Council website, <http://www.ruscico.com/dvd.php?lang=en&dvd=316>, last accessed 23-01-2010

<sup>16</sup> *Kin Dza Dza!* part 1, 42:05 min. The translation is mine.

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FIGURE 1 THE FIRST ENCOUNTER



**FIGURE 2 A HOLOGRAM OF P.J. APPEARS IN THE DESERT**



FIGURE 3 P.J. GREETS





FIGURE 4 THE "KIN DZA DZA" ISLAND IN SECOND LIFE





FIGURE 5 GREETING AN ETSILOP (POLICEMAN) AFTER PERFORMING IN A CAGE